

Postcolonial Performance

On stage with d'bi.young anitafrika
and *word! sound! powah!*

Hyacinth M. Simpson

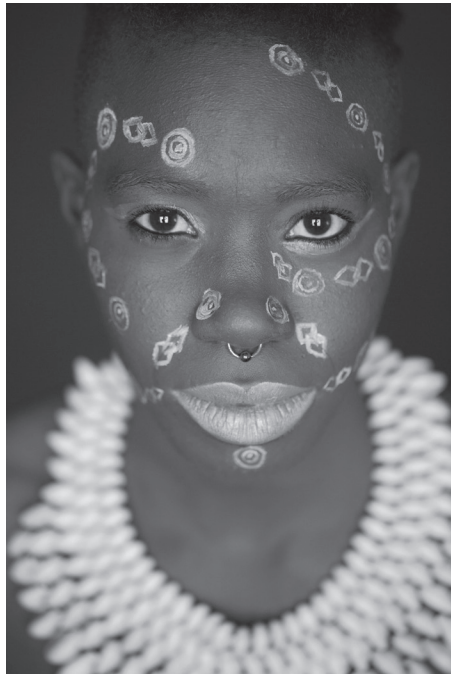
d'bi.young anitafrika, award-winning Canadian playwright, actor, and dub poet, recently returned to the stage with new work. *word!sound!powah!*, the final installment in her Sankofa trilogy, debuted at Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille's mainspace from August 7-14 during the SummerWorks 2010 festival. Since then, Canadian performances of the work have included a staging on 21 November, 2010 during Tarragon Theatre's Play Reading Week and several shows when it played in repertoire with the other two works—*benu* and *blood.claat*—again at the Tarragon from 22 October to 4 December, 2011. Coming as it does after several years during which young anitafrika tested and refined (through teaching, mentoring,¹ and multiple performances) her unique articulation of dramatic methodology and form, *word!sound!powah!* is arguably the play in which she most clearly demonstrates that she is creating a new art form for the contemporary Canadian stage.

young anitafrika describes the kind of plays that she creates and performs as “biomyth monodrama,” and *word!sound!powah!* is a good example of the form. She describes biomyth monodrama as “theatrical solo-performance work, written and acted by the same person, inspired in parts by the creator's biographical experience [and which uses] poetry, music, myth, magic, monologue and dialogue (primarily with the audience) to weave the story together” (“Seven Orplusi Principles of Storytelling”). young anitafrika found inspiration in the late African American (of Caribbean heritage) queer author Audre Lorde who first used the term “biomythography” in the title of her 1982 work *Zami*. young anitafrika's interpretation of the practice involves drawing on details from her personal life and interweaving them with historical and mythological material from African, Afro-Jamaican, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-diasporic communities in order to drive the storyline and develop

characters in her plays. Such biographical material is heavily mythologized so that young anitafrika can write her “own truth” without “necessarily writ[ing] exactly how it is” (“Accountability” 13). This practice results in plays that are deeply personal and culturally rooted yet universal in their ability to connect diverse audiences with the issues they address.

young anitafrika’s preference for monodrama stems in part from her characterization of her work as storytelling, for which she finds a parallel in the role of the *griot* in West African oral traditions. It is also partly rooted in young anitafrika’s own understanding of artistic and personal integrity, which demands that her growing self- and political awareness demonstrate themselves in the choices she makes in her personal and professional life. As a storyteller, she is more than simply an actor working from a script on stage. Her performances are about connecting with her audience or “communities” (young anitafrika emphasizes

that she belongs to multiple communities) and creating a “sacred space” so that her storytelling becomes a means through which members of the community can address individual and collective issues of importance. Akin to the *griot* tradition, young anitafrika sees herself as storyteller, performer, chronicler of her communities’ histories and a visionary for their possible futures—especially if the healing of past traumas marks such futures. Thus, her plays have an urgency about them in that they compel our attention and urge us to feel passion and



Headshot of d’bi young anitafrika.

Photo by Rhett Morita.

a sense of responsibility for our world, our place within it, and how we can contribute to meaningful change. young anitafrika's plays are deeply political; they highlight the link between the exchanges and negotiations that take place in our everyday lives and relationships and larger political and social concerns. The plays remind us that our lives, and the choices that we make, matter. For young anitafrika, who grew up in Jamaica "with artists whose artistic and personal lives overlapped" (*s is for storytelling* 13), and who saw "no distance between the storyteller's lived experience and the storyteller's work" (12), the personal is, indeed, political.

As the sole performer commanding the stage for the duration of each play, young anitafrika is very conscious of how monodrama facilitates and augments performer-audience interaction. She notes that "[T]he performer blends the divide between real and make believe, audience and storyteller" ("Seven Orplusi Principles of Storytelling"). For young anitafrika, "[T]he fourth wall is non-existent. i am implicated by you and you are implicated by me. performance is as much about giving and receiving as it is about entertaining" (*s is for storytelling* 17–18). She points to an earlier experience with the Jamaican oral tradition that helped cement her understanding of the theatre as shared sacred space for interaction between the storyteller and her communities rather than just a physical space that accommodates a stage, actors, and an audience:

the storyteller should honour the storytelling space. The storytelling space is a sacred space and a space that is given to us by the community. sometimes i see storytellers who get into the storytelling space and it's clear they don't want to be there—it's as though they're doing us a big favour. but orality or performance are essential. I remember when my grandmother told me stories she would use everything available to her to communicate that story because she cared about whether or not we got the message. (*s is for storytelling* 17)

young anitafrika's monodramatic work is rooted in an African/African-diaspora orality where the purpose and desired outcome of storytelling and performance are, along with entertainment, shared responsibil-

ity and reciprocity. She maintains that “orality is a reciprocal process moving through and past the fourth wall” (“Seven Orplusi Principles of Stoytelling”). In keeping with this vision, young anitafrika often engages in “talkback” sessions with her audience at the end of her plays, as she did after performances of *word!sound!powah!*: “I’m learning that I can’t present provocative subject matter and expect my audience to go home and be okay,” she says. “There has to be a process where we can dialogue about the work. A storyteller is there first and foremost for the transformation of the community, and they must be responsible to the people who will allow them to be on stage” (qtd. in Dupuis).

young anitafrika has also moved away from ensemble work to monodrama because the latter gives her a choice about how she represents herself and develops as an artist:

[S]olo shows gives [sic] me the most control over my art! [laughs] also, it can be challenging saying other people’s words, when if what they are saying is not what you believe. or if the whole picture doesn’t come down to a philosophy that you endorse. that for me is like doing an ad campaign for a credit card company. so, I feel all my methodology boils down to, or can be instilled into, the idea of integrity. integrity has to hold it all together. that is simpler when I’m doing my own work, that is simpler in that biomyth, monodramatic place. (“Accountability” 14)

In fact, integrity is one of the eight principles that informs the methodology that guides young anitafrika’s creative process and performances. Together, these Sorplusi principles—an acronym for self-awareness, orality, rhythm, political content, language, urgency, sacredness, and integrity²—also form the basis of her arts training program, in which she teaches diverse groups of aspiring playwrights and artists how to apply them to create dramatic and other works that respond to their own realities and concerns as well as those of their communities.

young anitafrika’s Sorplusi principles are “heavily influenced by dub-poetry,” and four of them, orality, rhythm, political content, and language, “are fundamental pillars of dubpoetry” (“Seven Orplusi Principles

of Storytelling”). Indeed, her references to dub not only locate young anitafrika’s personal and cultural influences but also explain some of the oral and performance strategies as well as musical forms that she incorporates into and uses to frame and structure her plays. One indication of the connection between young anitafrika’s theatre praxis and Afro-Jamaican orality comes in her choice of a title for the play. “Word, sound, powah!” has long been a catch phrase within Jamaica’s roots reggae culture, out of which dub poetry—which young anitafrika writes, records, and performs—emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Much like Jamaica’s seminal reggae musicians such as Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, and Bunny Wailer, founding and contemporary dub poets—including Oku Onura, Mickey Smith, and Mutabaruka in Jamaica; Linton Kwesi Johnson and Jean “Binta” Breeze in the United Kingdom; and Lillian Allen and Clifton Joseph in Canada—have always been politically aware and have used their art to intervene in and comment on social injustice and other issues of concern to communities that traditionally have had no public voice. The phrase “word, sound, power” refers to both the potential and use of the spoken word as a catalyst for social and political change. As spoken in dialogue/monologue, verse, and song, the “word” is the language of ordinary Jamaican folk, the (often demotic) registers in which they communicate and make meaning for themselves. Its rhythms—that is, its cadence, musicality, and metre—animate, enliven, facilitate, and ground the message in the people’s lived reality; “word” encapsulates and elevates forms such as reggae and dub poetry that come out of the oral tradition and which ordinary folk developed for artistic expression. It is not surprising, then, that dub poems feature heavily in *word!sound!powah!* and are used to drive the plot, develop characters’ personalities, and convey the play’s message. Personal and public histories also overlap dynamically in the play’s title as “word, sound, powah” was the rallying cry of the founding members of the Poets in Unity, a group of students, including young anitafrika’s mother Anita Stewart, at the Jamaica School of Drama in the 1970s and 1980s around whom the early dub poetry movement coalesced.

word!sound!powah! is set in Kingston, Jamaica in the days leading up to and immediately after one of the island’s violent General Election

campaigns. If audience members wish to locate the action in a specific temporal moment, they could choose the now infamously violent General Election campaign of 1980. This was the time period suggested in the 2010 performances of the play. Or they could choose one of the more recent campaigns. During the 2011 Tarragon run, young anitafrika made direct references in her performances of the play to the (then upcoming) General Election held on the island on 29 December, 2011. But specificity of time and place do not mean limiting the play's message to one particular cultural or historical experience. Although the play specifically explores the schemes and wiliness of Jamaica's partisan politicians, the detrimental effects their policies have on ordinary Jamaicans, and the resistance mounted by a group of students, its larger message concerns irresponsibility and corruption in governments, the continued marginalization of the poor, and the power of the people to demand and effect political change. Such a message resonates cross-culturally, especially as the international community recently witnessed, in Egypt, Syria, Libya, Yemen and elsewhere, the political will and power of the populace. The basic storyline follows a group of young anitafrika Jamaican students from the local Cultural Training Centre whose Poets in Solidarity group (a re-imagining of the Poets in Unity) uses the power of the spoken word—in the form of dub poetry—to challenge oppressive and exploitative politics. The group uses their words, rhymes, rhythms and the textures, tones, and cadences of their Jamaican voices to “chant down Babylon” (a phrase popularized by Jamaican Rastafari as a means of voicing resistance to political and other forms of oppression) on the island and anywhere else that the play's message resonates.

The play's central conflict and dénouement turn on the arrest and brutal interrogation of one of the members of Poets in Solidarity. The arrest occurs after the group is disbanded on the night they stage a “counter demonstration” to the winning political party's victory celebrations in the open square at Half-Way-Tree in Kingston, and its members accused of conspiring to assassinate the newly elected Prime Minister. The arrested group member is Benu Sankofa. Benu's relationship with her grandmother is significant in terms of the younger woman's development and provides an example of young anitafrika's emphasis, here



d'bi young anitafrika performing Benu's interrogation at the Tarragon theatre in 2011. Photo by Rhett Morita.

and in other plays, on female forebears and matriarchal lineage. Her woman-centred works recover mythical female figures from African and African-diasporic traditions and integrate them into her stories to suggest that knowing and understanding one's history (or her/story), as well as reclaiming and reconciling with one's past in transformative ways, can lead to a self-awareness that is empowering for both the individual and the community.

The play sets up the convergence between past and present, myth and history, the real and the magical, beautifully. From the play's opening moments, echoes of the past are heard in the present. The betrayal of the Jamaican people by their political leaders mirrors the way in which African leaders centuries ago betrayed their own by selling them into slavery. The play suggests that, not unlike African tribal chiefs who traded bodies for goods, contemporary leaders in the Caribbean and elsewhere deceive and use the poor for their own political gain, whipping up emotions with political slogans and encouraging people to kill and maim one another to protect party interests and cement the power of dictators. young anitafrika establishes a frame for the comparison

in the opening moments of her performance. An adept solo performer who embodies several characters over the course of the story, young anitafrika first takes on the character of a traditional storyteller. The storyteller recounts five hundred years of African and Afro-Caribbean history in verse and song and invokes a number of deities and ancestors to assist her in telling the long history of a people and the more contemporary story that develops onstage.

Chief among the deities invoked is Oya, the Yoruba goddess of the winds of change. Through Oya's eyes, the audience sees that although much has changed over generations, much has also remained the same. The island gained political independence from British colonial masters in 1962; as Peaches, an unemployed single mother who appears at various moments throughout the play, points out, however, the years between 1962 and the present day of the play's actions should have brought tangible change but life has not improved for the masses. In this context, a prominently displayed Jamaican flag is a particularly ironic prop. The irony is underscored by juxtaposing scenes in which a self-satisfied, mealy-mouthed politician regales his audience with stories of his and his party's largesse to the populace with other scenes that demonstrate the liberties he takes with the truth. For Benu, Peaches, and others, political independence has only meant replacing one exploiter with another. Moved by Oya's spirit to challenge the status quo and take revolutionary action, Benu, Peaches, Sage,



d'bi young anitafrika performing as Peaches at the Tarragon theatre in 2011.

Photo by Rhett Morita.



d'bi young anitafrika performing as the Politician at the Tarragon theatre in 2011. Photo by Rhett Morita.

Bobus, Stamma and other members of Poets in Solidarity resolve to bring about a shift in the political winds.

In a deft play at mythologizing biography, young anitafrika makes Benu, whose turn as a dub poet mirrors the lives of both the playwright and her mother, a Maroon and direct descendant of “Granny Nanny.” Nanny, one of seven officially recognized national heroes in Jamaica, and the only woman among them, was a fierce rebel warrior whose name is synonymous with resistance; she is a symbol of the unity and strength the Jamaican people can find in hard times. The stuff of both history and legend, the details of Nanny’s life inspire Benu to be courageous under brutal interrogation. Nanny’s fame as a formidable warrior and military strategist is captured in the Poets in Solidarity’s motto, “death before dishonour!” The motto, which is also the refrain of a song of the same name by late reggae musician Dennis Brown, is recited in the face of attempts by compromised law enforcers to thwart them. At a pivotal point in the play, Benu is led into the forest by her grandmother where the older woman initiates her granddaughter into the rites of their ancestors. Benu literally comes face-to-face with African and Afro-

Jamaican spirits and ancestors, including Nanny. The significance of this encounter to Benu's awakening as a true revolutionary is powerfully realized in the play's final moments.

young anitafrika skillfully employs the power of sound, rhythm, rhyme, and metre to convey complex ideas and develop the characters she plays within the short space of time that she is on stage. Indeed, her performances are sheer poetry, both in the sense of being sublime and because she uses poetry as a dramatic tool. Peaches, for example, provides a comprehensive portrait of single motherhood in straitened economic circumstances in verse form that takes no more than a couple of minutes of stage time. In some senses, what young anitafrika achieves is not unlike the verse that added resonance to Shakespeare's plays, or the way in which postcolonial dramatists such as Derek Walcott and Wole Soyinka mingle prose with verse forms that owe as much, if not more, to the storytelling, song, and rituals of their native oral traditions than to the history of theatre practice in the West. young anitafrika's work is distinguished by the explicit connection she draws between her theatre aesthetic and the political and poetical formulations that underlie dub poetry.



d'bi young anitafrika performing as Benu at the Tarragon theatre in 2011. Photo by Rhett Morita.

Roots reggae rhythms set the pace and tone for a good portion of the play. Artfully meta, *word!sound!powah!* incorporates performances of actual dub poems into the narrative, even as the play itself is informed by a dub aesthetic. The Poets in Solidarity see public performance as an important dimension of their art. One of the most electrifying moments in the play occurs when Benu, upon being introduced to the members of Poets in Solidarity, is asked to demonstrate her skill as a poet. She takes to the microphone with the air of a seasoned verse maker, belting out the poem “Beggin’ Is A Ting,” an anthem of the oppressed and dispossessed, to a dread and infectious beat:

beggin’ is a ting
 a carry di swing
 inna dis ya time
 it cyan be a crime

 I walk down town
 one a deh days
 haffi stand up a while
 and tek a good gaze
 di city is plagued
 and it reach a stage

Benu’s poem, which was first composed and performed by young anitafrika’s mother in the mid-1980s,³ is a powerful indictment of the poverty and disenfranchisement that characterize postcolonial Jamaican politics, but it is also a rallying call for the disenfranchised anywhere. While the poems were performed to musical accompaniment,⁴ their sonic power is intrinsic. As is the case with the work of more accomplished dub poets, the poem’s powerfully expressive rhythms are internal to its structure and determine the beat and arrangement of accompanying music rather than the other way around.

young anitafrika’s physicality—the way she uses her body and voice on stage—is an important aspect of how she creates rhythm, both when performing the poems and in the play as a whole. Rhythm facilitates

message. When performing “Beggin’ Is A Ting” and other poems, young anitafrika’s voice textures, low crouches, sharp body turns, hand movements, and other articulatory gestures enunciate the language of the poems and allow her audience to appreciate, on multiple sensory levels, the extent of the social crisis she describes. The core of any solo performance is the actor’s ability to successfully embody the characters she plays, and young anitafrika understands this. Benu, for example, moves through a character arc from timid and fearful to confident and defiant without a jarring note. The change is believable because of the small yet effective shifts in posture and voice timbre that young anitafrika employs. young anitafrika’s male characters are as alive and convincing as her female ones. Both set and costuming facilitate quick and seamless character transitions as these changes rely on the actor’s skill of embodiment rather than props. In the 2010 performances young anitafrika wore a black T-shirt and trousers on stage and during the 2011 run she choose white sleeveless shirt and matching jeans; when switching characters, she made small costume changes such as adding an army shirt. The set for the 2010 and 2011 performances comprised a Jamaican flag, a desk and chair, with the latter two items doing double duty as furniture in the interrogation room and a podium for the politician’s speeches. A tree, as described below, was a spectacular addition to the set in the 2011 performances.

As is the practice among dub poets, young anitafrika’s chosen glossia in the dub poems and for her characters is that of the working-class folk who populate her play, a choice that aligns her artistic sympathies with the communities represented in her work. Her language choice is, then, clearly political and gives “representatives” from such communities a voice. Interestingly, the language of delivery, a wide sampling of the Jamaican language continuum ranging from patois to Jamaican Standard, did not appear to pose any barriers to young anitafrika’s communication with her audience. People in attendance at the shows I saw came from a variety of cultural backgrounds and spanned generations: Jamaican Canadians familiar with the language; Canadians with links to other islands and territories in the region, where the local language—ranging from patois to Standard Jamaican English—and voice inflections

are very different; second- and third-generation Caribbean Canadians who are undoubtedly more familiar with the speech and inflections of multicultural urban spaces such as Toronto than those of an island thousands of kilometres away; and audience members with no connection to the Caribbean. young anitafrika's work obviously has wide appeal, and she seems to have quite a few devoted admirers who turned up to multiple showings to see *word!sound!powah!* through its evolution on stage.

Intelligibility and effectiveness are more than a function of language use or cultural familiarity. *word!sound!powah!* has the highly desirable quality of being both rooted in the particular and able to communicate on a universal level. It works because it is beautifully crafted and organic. young anitafrika's ability to clearly articulate her theatre praxis enables an uncluttered stage presentation. She is a fine actor whose characters are subtly shaped, believable, and relatable: no broad strokes or farce here, even if a character occupies the stage for only a few seconds. The fine-tuning the play underwent over the summer and into the fall of 2010 and then at the end of 2011 improved young anitafrika's overall delivery and tightened the script.

Take, for example, young anitafrika's eventual decision to cut the re-counting of a folktale that happens approximately two thirds of the way into the play. The folktale (young anitafrika credits one of her accompanying musicians for composing the tale) was included in the 12 August, 2010 performance, omitted from the final SummerWorks show on 14 August, 2010, and added again when *word!sound!powah!* played at the Tarragon on 21 November 2010. It was cut from the 2011 Tarragon performances. My own sense when I first heard the folktale was that, while entertaining, it caused the action to drag. It did not seem to directly provide context or information that added to the audience's understanding of the plot or the characters. Additionally, there was a shift away from the carefully crafted oral delivery of other scenes towards something more akin to stand-up comedy. The audience clearly found the tale entertaining—there was a lot of laughter—whenever it was included, but the interaction felt less satisfying than those moments when young anitafrika reached beyond the fourth wall and effectively engaged her audience in the storytelling.

young anitafrika's inclusion of the folktale in the 2010 performance at the Tarragon was much more seamless because the lead up to the recounting of the tale, provided by the Sage character immediately prior to the moment the police charged the group in the square, was revised so that the relationship between the tale's contents and the issues addressed in the rest of the play was clarified. But its exclusion from the 2011 run indicates that young anitafrika had a firmer grip on her understanding and use of storytelling as a structuring device in this play and the trilogy as a whole. Indeed, the play's ending was revised in the 2010 Tarragon performance to more obviously identify the theatrical performance itself as a storytelling event. Instead of ending on Benu's powerfully-worded defiance of her jailers as in the SummerWorks performances, the storyteller character who opens the play appears again to close it with another invocation of the deities. The new ending gives the play a greater sense of symmetry and underscores the role of the playwright-cum-actor as storyteller. This new ending was retained in the 2011 run, and the presentation of the theatrical experience as an oral storytelling event was heightened through set choices. Designed by Camellia Koo,



d'bi young anitafrika performing as the Storyteller at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto, Ontario in 2011. Photo by Rhett Morita.

the set was comprised mainly of a large stylized tree. Its roots and trunk occupied most of the space upstage centre, while its branches arched over the ceiling above the stage and extended over the heads of the audience. Especially for those familiar with traditions of storytelling in the Jamaican oral context, the set immediately evoked the practice of using outdoor spaces—and particularly large trees that provide a comfortable shade for storyteller and audience—as meeting spots for storytelling and other performances. Koo's set effectively transformed the theatre space into a traditional gathering under a tree and, in so doing, had subtle but telling effects on the dynamics of actor-audience interaction.

There were other small but important revisions from the SummerWorks to the 2010 Tarragon performance, many of which were retained in the 2011 run. The ongoing revisions are in keeping with young anitafrika's conception of her performances as drafts, which indicates that she is not overly concerned with nor does she feel pressure to stage a final, fixed product:

i feel like i'm working on product and process simultaneously. and i mention product because i am very, very interested in product. i'm interested in product because when you look at the end result of an accumulation of energy, you can use that end result to access where to go from next. so product is very important in terms of marking one's journey and one's growth. process is also integral because the product is not the be-all and end-all of the entire process . . . my work is always evolving, so whether we call it a world premiere, whether we call it a workshop, it's always a work in process to me. i always reserve the right to go back to a piece and tweak it in the ways that i've grown and changed. ("Accountability" 14, 16)

The playwright's relationship with her audience/communities is integral to the creative process, and young anitafrika is as adept at integrating her audience into performances as she is concerned with getting their feedback on the performances. Whether through staging choices that bring the actor into the space normally reserved for the audience, or through the actor initiating dialogue with the audience (to name

just two of several strategies employed), young anitafrika consistently and effectively broke through the fourth wall in ways that reinforce the theatrical experience as a storytelling event in which both actor and audience are invested. For example, when introducing and concluding the play, the actor in character as the storyteller enters and leaves the stage by walking through the audience and addressing her incantations directly to individual members. It is a gesture that transforms the latter from mere spectators into active witnesses in the story and demonstrates young anitafrika's desire to both bring her storytelling to what she constantly refers to in interviews as her "village" and acknowledge their participation in bringing the story to light.

Other moments in which young anitafrika broke through the fourth wall were equally satisfying in the cohesion they lent to the play's overall form and delivery. The reciprocity that young anitafrika constantly strives for was achieved in several scenes, including the one in which, this time in character as Bobus, she engages directly with the audience. When introducing Benu to the other members of the Poets in Unity group, who are played by the audience, Bobus emphasizes the latter's



d'bi young anitafrika performing as Bobus at the Tarragon theatre in 2011. Photo by Rhett Morita.

“Maroon” heritage and then quizzes group members/the audience on the origin and meaning of the word. Members of the audience invariably shout out answers, and the subsequent moments of improvisation that result as young anitafrika adjusts her response from performance to performance to audience reaction make for real “live” and interactive theatre. The exchange represents more than just a fun moment of actor-audience interaction, however. As a result of dramaturgical decisions, audience members momentarily assume the role of supporting actors. In the scene, young anitafrika moves far downstage to create a more intimate, conspiratorial atmosphere as the audience is drawn into keeping the poetry group’s meeting a secret from political and police spies. It is a moment of true audience participation; and, as with oral storytelling traditions from which young anitafrika draws inspiration, audience members become active agents in making story.

To say that *word!sound!powab!* has proven popular with theatre goers borders on understatement. young anitafrika was given enthusiastic standing ovations at the end of the majority of her performances, and enthusiastic theatregoers took to staying behind for the talkback sessions and for long after to talk about the play and celebrate with young anitafrika. The play was among those singled out for Outstanding Performance and Outstanding Music in *Now Magazine*’s 2010 annual list of the “best of the fest,” and online as well as print reviews of the Tarragon 2011 run have been overwhelmingly positive. With *word!sound!powab!* and the completion of the Sankofa trilogy, young anitafrika has once again proven why she is one of Canada’s most accomplished contemporary dramatists.

Notes

- 1 young anitafrika founded anitAFRIKA!dub theatre in Toronto in the spring of 2008 while completing a professional mentorship program in dub theatre with ahdri zhina mandielu, Artistic Director of b current, a performance art company also located in Toronto. anitAFRIKA! dub theatre was launched in July of 2008 and, in addition to training emerging young artists using her Sorplusi methodology, young anitafrika used her theatre company to host arts festivals and conferences (or “un-conferences” as she calls them) and workshops for peoples from marginalized groups and the wider community. anitAFRIKA!dub theatre closed

its doors at 62 Fraser Avenue in the Liberty Village in 2010 largely due to young anitafrika's hectic tour schedule, but was reincarnated as the main performance department of the Pan Afrikan Performing Arts Institute after young anitafrika's move to Cape Town, South Africa in November 2010. In January 2011, young anitafrika founded the Yemoya International Artist Residency Program (so far hosted in Canada, India, Jamiaca, South Africa, and the UK) as the arts training arm of anitAFRIKA!dub theatre. For more information on anitAFRIKA! dub theatre, see young anitafrika's anthology of plays by artists she mentored during the program, *s is for storytelling* (5–8) and a three-and-a-half minute promotional trailer (2008) directed by Sarah Brown and featuring young anitafrika that is available on sites such as YouTube. The website for the Pan Afrikan Performing Arts institute is <<http://papainstitute.org/>>, and that for the Yemoya project is <<http://yemoya.org>>. young anitafrika's personal website <<http://dbiyoung.com>> provides a wealth of information on her projects.

- 2 young anitafrika began with seven principles (see “Seven Orplusi Principles of Storytelling” and *s is for storytelling* 10–19) but added an eighth—self-awareness—around November 2010. She announced her addition of the eighth principle on Facebook and during the talkback session at the Tarragon on November 21, 2010. Her methodology, like her plays, continues to evolve.
- 3 “Begg’in’ Is A Ting” appears on the album *Woman Talk: Caribbean Dub Poetry*, which was produced by Mutabaruka for Heartbeat Records in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1986. Stewart contributed two poems to the album, which also features contributions by six other female poets.
- 4 For the SummerWorks performances, young anitafrika was accompanied by two musicians: one on the digeridoo (a Northern Australian Aboriginal wind instrument traditionally made from large branches or trunks of trees or bamboo) and another on sticks. At the 2010 Tarragon performance, she was accompanied by a musician on the digeridoo and another on the djembe (a West African skin-covered drum played with bare hands). The choice of instruments is in keeping with young anitafrika's philosophy. All three instruments originate with and are used within oral cultures and settings. As well, the role these instruments play in their originating cultures connects with young anitafrika's emphasis on the relationship between the artist and her community, as well as her understanding of theatre as a sacred space. For example, the djembe is used to gather people peacefully and the digeridoo traditionally accompanies the ceremonial dancing and singing that bring communities together. By using instruments from different cultures, young anitafrika signals the interconnectedness of communities and points to the similarities, rather than the differences, among various peoples. For the 2011 Tarragon run, four musicians took turns (two on each performance) backing young anitafrika in performance. Here, too, the instruments as well as the musical sounds that ranged from

Asia to Africa encompassed the multiple cultural communities young anitafrika embraces in her life and art.

Works Cited

- anitAFRIKA! dub theatre*. Dir. Sarah Brown. Perf. d'bi.young anitafrika. 2008. Film.
- Dupuis, Chris. "Rhubarb Star d'bi young Inspired by Rihanna." *Xtra!*. Xtra!, 11 February 2010. Web. 3 September 2010.
- "Here's NOW's Annual List of the Best of the Fest." *NOW* 19 Aug. 2010: 59. Print.
- Lorde, Audre. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name-A Biomythography*. 1982. Freedom: Crossing, 1994. Print.
- WomanTalk: Caribbean Dub Poetry*. Prod. Mutabaruka. Heartbeat Records, 1986. CD.
- young anitafrika, d'bi. "Accountability, integrity, and *benu*: An interview with d'bi. young." Interview by Holly Luhnig. *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage* 8.1 (2010): 10–17. Print.
- . *benu: a biomyth monodrama. The sankofa trilogy part 11*. Unpublished, 2011. Typescript.
- . *blood.claats/sangre*. Spanish trans. queen nzinga maxwell edwards. Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 2005. Print.
- . "Seven Orplusi Principles of Storytelling: d'bi.young's Biomyth Monodrama Creative Process (Pt. 1)." Web. 15 August 2010.
- , ed. *s is for storytelling; an anthology of solo performance works*. Self-published, 2009. Print.
- . *word!sound!powah!: a biomyth monodrama: the sankofa trilogy part III*. Unpublished, 2011. Typescript.

All photographs are provided courtesy of the playwright, d'bi young anitafrika, who has copyright.